

★ OF AUCASSIN & NICOLETTE
LAURENCE HOUSMAN





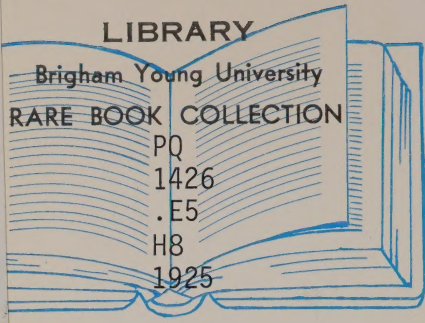


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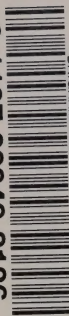
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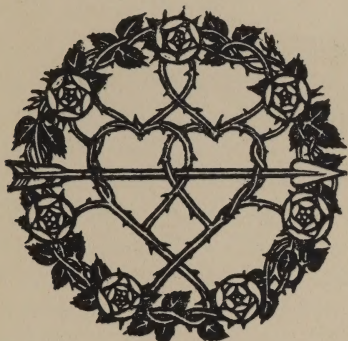
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OF AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE
AMABEL AND AMORIS



OF AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE

A TRANSLATION IN PROSE
AND VERSE FROM THE OLD
FRENCH TOGETHER WITH
AMABEL AND AMORIS



BY LAURENCE HOUSMAN
WITH DRAWINGS BY PAUL
WOODROFFE ENGRAVED ON
THE WOOD BY CLEMENCE
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'TIS OF AUCASSIN AND
OF NICOLETTE

WHO would wish good verse to hear,
Made to please an old man's ear,
Where two children fair stand set,
Aucassin and Nicolette;
Of the great pains were his load,
And the prowess that he showed
For his dear, so blithe of cheer?
Sweet's the song and fair's the word,
Courteous to the ear when heard.
No man can be so distraught,
Grieving so, so lost in thought,
Or in so great malady,
But at sound he cured must be,
And his heart for gladness beat;
It is so sweet!

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

How the Count Bougars of Valence made war on Count Garin of Beaucaire, so great and so wonderful and so deadly, that never a day dawned but he was about the gates and walls and barriers of the town, with a hundred knights and ten thousand soldiers, foot and horse; and he burned his land, and wasted his country, and killed his men.

The Count Garin of Beaucaire was old and frail, and had outstayed his time. He had no heir, neither son nor daughter, save an only boy, of such sort as I shall tell you. Aucassin was the young lord's name; fair he was, shapely and fine, and well formed in legs and feet and body and arms. His hair was yellow and close curled, his eye merry and grey, and his face clear and keen, with a high nose firmly set. He was so charged with good points that nothing bad, or that was not good, was to be found in him. But so overthrown was he by Love, the all-conqueror, that he wished not to be knight nor to take arms, nor to go into tourney, nor to do anything which he ought to have done.

His father and his mother say to him: 'Son, now take thine arms, and mount thy horse, and fight for thy land, and bring aid to thy men! If they see thee among them, the better will they

defend their bodies and their belongings, and thy land and mine.'

'Father,' replies Aucassin, 'of what do you speak now? May God never give me anything that I ask, if as knight I mount horse, or go into fray or battle where I may strike knight, or he me, unless you give me Nicolette, my sweet friend, whom I so love!'


'Son,' says the father, 'that could not be. Let Nicolette alone, seeing that she is a slave-girl come from a strange land; the Viscount of this town bought her from the Saracens, and brought her to this place, and has reared her, and baptized, and made her his god-daughter; and one of these days he will give her to some young man, who will earn honourable bread for her. With this thou hast nothing to do. And if thou art after a wife, I will give thee a King's or a Count's daughter. There is no man so rich in France but, if thou desire his daughter, thou shalt have her.'

'Alas, father!' says Aucassin, 'where is there now such high honour on earth, but if Nicolette, my most sweet friend, had it, it were well placed in her? Were she Empress of Constantinople or of Germany, or Queen of France or of England, it would be little enough for her, so noble is she, and courteous and debonair, and abounding in all good graces.'

Now one sings.

AUCASSIN from Beaucaire came,
 Courtly castle of high fame.
 From the fair-made Nicolette
 None may win a heart so set;
 Though his father stands between,
 And his mother harsh of mien:
 'Out, alack! what fool's way's this?
 Nicolette right winsome is:
 Carthage town cast out the maid,
 Saxon folk of her made trade.
 If to wed thy heart is bent,
 Take a dame of high descent!'
 'Mother, naught for none I care!
 Nicolette is debonair:
 Her fair body, her bright eyes,
 Hold my heart in enterprise.
 Well is me, her love seems meet:
 It is so sweet!'

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

HEN the Count Garin of Beaucaire saw that he would not be able to draw Aucassin his son back from the love of Nicolette, he went to the Viscount of the town, who was in his service, and thus spake to him:

‘Come you, Sir Count, and get rid of Nicolette your god-daughter! Evil be to the land from which she was fetched into this country! For now through her I lose Aucassin, that will not be a knight or do anything that he ought to do. And know well that, if I can get hold of her, I will burn her in a fire, and you yourself might have every reason to fear.’

‘Sire,’ said the Viscount, ‘it grieves me that he goes to her, or comes to her, or has speech with her. I had bought her with my money, and had reared her, and baptized and made her my god-daughter, and would have given her to a young man who would have earned honourable bread for her. With this would your son Aucassin have had nothing to do. But since it is your will and pleasure, I will send her to such a land and such a country that nevermore shall he set eyes on her.’

‘Keep you to it!’ says the Count Garin. ‘Great evil might come to you of it!’

They went each his way. And the Viscount was a very rich man, and he had a rich palace looking upon a garden. There in a chamber on a high storey caused he Nicolette to be placed, and with her an old woman to give her countenance and fellowship; and there he let put bread and meat, and wine, and whatsoever was needful. Then he let seal the door, so that one could by no way go in there or go out, save that there was one window opening upon the garden, and quite small, through which came to them a little fresh air.



Now one sings.

NICOLETTE, for prison close,
To a vaulted chamber goes;
Cunning art had there made be
Paintings wonderful to see.
By the window's marble wall
Leaned herself the maid in thrall.
Bright blond locks her hair let go,
Shapely were her brows below;
Fair and clear without a flaw,
Such sweet face you never saw.
She looked out on forest bower,
There she saw the rose in flower,
And the birds that singing went.
Then from orphan came lament:
' Me alas! ah, wretched me!
Why should I in prison be?
Aucassin, my lord and liege,
Love of you has me in siege,
Me, whom now you cannot hate,
That for you bear captive state
In this vaulted chamber high,
Where through weary days I lie.
But by Mary's Son I pray
Hence ere long to make my way,
If I but may!'

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.



NICOLETTE was in the prison-chamber, as you have heard and had it told. The cry and the rumour went through all the land and through all the country that Nicolette was lost. Some say that she is fled forth from the country, and some that the Count Garin of Beaucaire has caused her to be slain. Whosoever had joy of it, Aucassin was not glad, but went to the Viscount of the town and thus spake to him:

‘Sir Viscount, what have you done with Nicolette, my most sweet friend, the thing in all the world that I most loved? Have you ravished her away, or stolen her from me? Know well that if I die of it, the penalty will be on you; and very rightly will that be so, since with your two hands you will have slain me; for you have taken from me the thing in this world that I most loved.’

‘Fair Sir,’ said the Viscount, ‘now let be! Nicolette is a captive whom I brought from a strange land; with my own money I bought her of the Saracens, and reared her, and baptized and made her my god-daughter, and have nourished her; and one of these days I would have given her to a young man, who would have earned honourable bread for her. With

this you have nothing to do. But take you a king's or a count's daughter to wife. Moreover, what would you think to have gained if you had taken her for paramour and brought her to your bed? Much of little would you have got by it, for all the days of the world would your soul be in Hell for it, since into Paradise never could you win.'

'In Paradise what have I to do? I seek not to enter there, but only to have Nicolette, my most sweet friend, whom I so love! For into Paradise go none but such folk as I shall tell you. There go these old priests, and the old cripples and the maimed, who all day and all night crouch in front of the altars and in the old crypts, and those who are clad in old worn-out coats and tattered rags, who go naked and barefoot and full of sores, who die of hunger, and hardship, and cold, and wretchedness. All these go into Paradise; with them I have nothing to do. But into Hell I am willing to go; for to Hell go the fine clerks and the fair knights who have fallen in jousts and in ripe wars, and the skilled warriors and the brave men. With these I am fain to go. There also go the fair and courteous ladies who have two lovers or three, and their lords beside. And there go the gold and the silver, and the ermines and the grey furs; there, too, the harpers and the rhymers and the kings of the world. With these will I too go, so that I

may have with me Nicolette, my most sweet friend.'

'Certes,' said the Viscount, 'tis for nought that you shall speak thereof, for never will you see her. And if you spoke to her, and your father knew it, he would burn both me and her in a fire, and you yourself might have everything to fear.'

'That is my grief!' said Aucassin.

He departs from the Viscount sorrowfully.



Now one sings.

AUCASSIN has turned away,
Sorrowful, in sore dismay
For his love so bright of brow.
None can give him comfort now,
Nor in counsel aught can say.
To the palace then he fares,
Up and up he mounts the stairs,
Then into a chamber creeps,
Where he throws him down and weeps;
And great dole his heart lets go
For the love he longs for so:
'Nicolette, oh fair to show,
Fair to come, and fair to go,
Fair to please, and fair to say,
Fair to jest, and fair to play,
Fair to kiss, and fair to press,
Sore for thee is my distress!
And my grief's so ill to mend,
Sure it brings me to my end,
Sweet sister, friend!'

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

WHILE Aucassin was in the chamber and was mourning for Nicolette, his friend, the Count Bougars of Valence, who had his war to achieve, was in no wise forgetting it: and so, having marshalled his men, foot and horse, he went against the castle to storm it. And the cry arose and the clamour; and the knights and the soldiers arm themselves, and run to the gates and to the walls to defend the castle; and the burghers go up to the alleys of the ramparts and hurl quarrels and pointed stakes.

So while the assault was great and in full fling, the Count Garin of Beaucaire came into the chamber where Aucassin made dole and mourning for Nicolette, his most sweet friend, whom he so loved.

‘Ha! son,’ says he, ‘what a caitiff and unworthy thou art, to look on while they storm thy castle, the best and the strongest of all! And know, if thou lose it, thou art without inheritance! Son, come now, take arms and mount horse, and defend thy land, and carry aid to thy men, and go into the fray! Never smite a man there, nor let other smite thee; yet if they see thee among them they will the better defend their bodies and their belongings, and thy land and mine. And thou art so big and strong that thou canst well do it, and so oughtest to do.’

‘Father,’ replied Aucassin, ‘of what do you speak now? May God never give me anything that I ask him, if I do as knight, or mount horse, or go into fray where I may strike knight or he me, unless you give me Nicolette, my sweet friend, whom I so love!’

‘Son,’ said the father, ‘that cannot be! Rather would I suffer myself to be wholly despoiled, and to lose all that I hold, than that thou shouldst ever have her to bed or to wed.’

He turned away. And when Aucassin saw him going, he called him back.

‘Father,’ said Aucassin, ‘come forward! I will make a fair covenant with you.’

‘What is it to be, fair son?’

‘I will take arms, and go into the fray, on this covenant, that if God bring me back safe and sound you will let me see Nicolette, my sweet friend, so long as to have two or three words with her, and until I have once kissed her.’


‘I grant it,’ said his father.

So he agreed with him, and Aucassin was glad.

Now one sings.

AUCASSIN has heard the kiss
On returning shall be his.
Hundred thousand marks full weight
Could not make his heart so great.
Calling for his harness bright
Soon he stood accoutred right:
Hauberk lined his breast encased,
On his head his helm he laced,
Sword gold-hilted girds he on,
Lightly up to horse has gone,
Takes in hand his shield and lance,
At his two feet casts a glance,
Well the stirrup-irons they tread:
Wondrous high he holds his head.
Of his fair one thinking yet,
To his steed his spurs he set;
Fain and fast he rode away,
Making for the gate which lay
Toward the fray.

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

 UCASSIN was armed and horsed, as you have heard and had it told. God! how well sat the shield at his neck, and the helm on his head, and the sword-belt upon his left side. And the boy was big and strong, and fair, finely bred and well formed; and the horse whereon he sat was fiery and swift, and finely had the youth ridden him through the gate.

Now might you not think that his mind had been to take beeves or kine or goats, and that he would have struck knight, and had other strike him? None of that; not once did he think of it! But he thought so much of Nicolette, his sweet friend, that he forgot his reins and all that he had to do; and the horse that had felt the spur bore him away into the press, and hurled right into the midst of his foes; and they laid hands on him all round and caught him fast. Then they took from him shield and lance, and forthwith led him away prisoner, and already were consulting by what death to make an end of him. This when Aucassin heard:

‘Ah, God!’ quoth he, ‘sweet Maker! are these my mortal enemies that here have hold of me, and will now be cutting off my head? And when once I have my head cut off, nevermore shall I speak to Nicolette, my sweet friend,

whom I so love! Yet have I here a good sword, and I ride a goodly fresh steed. If now I defend me not for her sake, may God never help her if she love me more!

The boy was big and strong, and the horse whereon he sat was mettlesome. And he claps hand to sword, and starts smiting to right and to left, and cuts through helmets and arms and face-pieces and fists, and makes havoc about him, even as the wild boar when hounds set on him in the forest. And so he smites down ten knights of them and wounds seven, and so drives straight out of the *melée*, and so returns full speed back again, sword in hand.

The Count Bougars of Valence heard tell how they would be hanging Aucassin his enemy; and he came to that quarter, and Aucassin mistook him not. He gat his sword into his hand and smote him over the helm, so that he cleft him to the head. So stunned was he that he fell to earth; and Aucassin puts out his hand and takes him, and leads him away a prize by the nose-guard of his helmet and delivers him to his father.

‘Father,’ said Aucassin, ‘see here your enemy, who has so long warred on you and done you despite. For twenty years now has this war endured, and never by man could it be brought to an end.’

‘Fair son,’ said the father, ‘such feats of youth you ought to do, and not bay after folly.’

‘Father,’ said Aucassin, ‘give me no sermons, but keep your covenants with me!’

‘Bah! what covenants, fair son?’

‘Alas, father! have you forgotten them? By my head, whosoever forgets them, I will not so forget them, so greatly have I them at heart. Did you not make covenant with me, when I took arms and went to the fray, that if God brought me back safe and sound, you would let me see Nicolette, my sweet friend, so long as to have two or three words with her, and until I had once kissed her? This you had in covenant with me, and this will I that you hold to.’

‘I?’ said the father. ‘Never may God help me if ever I keep covenant with you in this! And if she were here now I would burn her in a fire, and you yourself might have everything to fear!’

‘Is this the full end?’ said Aucassin.

‘So help me God,’ replied his father, ‘yes!’

‘Certes,’ said Aucassin, ‘I am much grieved when a man of your age lies!—Count Valence,’ said Aucassin, ‘I took you prisoner?’

‘Surely, sir, you did!’ said the Count.

‘Give me your hand on it!’ said Aucassin.

‘Sir, right willingly!’ He put his hand into his.

‘You pledge me this,’ said Aucassin, ‘that on no day while you have life shall you be able to do my father dishonour or disturbance in his person or his property, but you will do it him!’

‘Sir, for God’s sake,’ said he, ‘mock me not, but put me to ransom! You will not know now how to ask of me gold or silver, horses or palfreys, ermine or grey, hawks or hounds, that I will not give you.’

‘What?’ says Aucassin; ‘know you not that I have taken you prisoner?’

‘Sir, I do!’ replies the Count Bougars.

‘Never may God help me,’ says Aucassin, ‘if, an’ you pledge me not, I do not now make that head fly off you!’

‘In God’s name,’ said he, ‘I promise you whatsoever you please!’

He gives him his word; and Aucassin makes him mount on a horse, and himself mounts another, and so leads him back into safety.



Now one sings.

Now when sees the Count Garin
How that his son Aucassin
Never can let leave him now
Nicolette, the bright of brow,
Into ward he sends him bound,
To a dungeon underground,
Which of dark grey stone was wrought.
Here when Aucassin was brought,
Sad as none could sadder be,
Loudly into grief brake he:
You shall hear him,—how distraught.
'Nicolette, thou fleur-de-lis,
Sweet, and dear, and fair to see,
Sweeter than the clustered vine,
Sweeter than the sop in wine!
Once a pilgrim did I see,
Out of Limousin came he:
Dizziness so laid him low,
Off his bed he might not go:
Sore on him was that disease,
Sick with many maladies.
Passing by where he lay down,
Thou did'st gather thy long gown,
And thy cloak of ermine bright,
And thy smock of linen white,
Till thine ankle they revealed.
Straightway was the pilgrim healed;

Ne'er till then so sound of limb
From his bed he lifted him;
Off to his own land he ran,
Sane and sound, a mended man!
Sweet my dear, my lily-bloom,
Fair to go, and fair to come,
Fair at play, and fair at flight,
Fair to speak, and fair delight,
Soft to kiss, and sweet to hold,
None to you could ere grow cold!
I for you in ward am bound,
In this dungeon underground,
Where I make an evil end:
Now I may but death attend
For you, sweet friend!'

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.



UCASSIN was put in prison, as you have heard and had it told; and Nicolette, on the other hand, was in the chamber. It was summer-time, the month of May, when the days are warm, and long, and clear, and the nights still and serene. Nicolette lay one night on her bed, and saw the moon shine clear through a window, and heard the nightingale sing in the garden, and she remembered Aucassin her friend, whom she loved so well. Then she began to concern herself with the Count Garin of Beaucaire, who hated her to death, and be-thought her that she would no longer remain there, since, if she were reported and the Count Garin knew of it, he would cause her to die an evil death.

She saw that the old woman who was with her was asleep; so she got up and put on a gown of silk cloth that she had, very fine, and took bedclothes and towels, and knotted them the one to the other, and made a cord as long as she could and bound it to the window-post, and let herself down into the garden. And she took her gown in one hand before and in the other behind, and tucked it up from the dew which she saw lying heavy on the grass, and went her way down the garden. Her hair was yellow and

closely curled, and her eyes grey and laughing; her face fairly formed, her nose high and well-set, her lips more red than a cherry or a rose in summer-time, and her teeth white and small; and her little breasts were so firm they lifted up her bodice as if they had been two walnuts; and she was slender in the waist, so that in your two hands you could have clasped her. And the heads of the daisies which she broke with the tips of her feet, and which fell upon her instep above, were dead black against her feet and limbs, so white was the small maiden.

She came to the postern and unlocked it, and passed forth through the streets of Beaucaire under cover of shadow, for the moon shone out bright, and wandered on till she came to the tower where her friend lay.

The tower was flawed in places, and she hid herself alongside one of the buttresses, and wrapped herself in her mantle, and laid her head into a crevice of the tower, which was old and time-worn, and heard Aucassin who there within wept and made great dole, sorrowing after his sweet friend whom he loved so well. And when she had hearkened to him long enough she began to speak.



Now one sings.

NICOLETTE, so blithe of cheer,
Leaned herself against a pier;
Aucassin there heard she mourn,
All for love of heart forlorn.
Then from thought her words came right:
'Aucassin, thou noble knight,
Fair lord of unshamed renown,
What avails to be cast down?
What are woe and weeping worth?
Ne'er of me shalt thou get mirth;
As thy father hates me true,
So thy kinsfolk likewise do.
Now for thee o'er seas I'll go,
Life in other lands to know.'
From her locks a tress she clipt,
And within the crevice slipt;
Aucassin, with this to touch,
May not honour it too much;
Oft he kissed it, and caressed,
Oft he clasped it to his breast,
Then again to weeping brake
For her dear sake.

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

WHEN Aucassin heard Nicolette tell how she would go away into another land, there was in him naught but rage. 'Fair, sweet friend,' said he, 'go you shall not, for then will you be my death! And the first that saw you or could come by you would take you forthwith and bring you to his bed, and have you for his paramour. And once you had lain in a man's bed other than mine, do not think that I would rest till I had found a knife wherewith I might strike me to the heart and make an end of me! Nay, surely, so long would I not wait, but would speed me to where I saw a wall or a greystone, and there would I hurl my head so hard that I would make my eyes start out of it, and beat out all my brains. Far rather would I die such a death than know that you had lain in a man's bed other than mine.'

'Alas!' said she, 'I think not that you love me so much as you say; but I love you more than you do me!'

'Alack!' said Aucassin, 'fair, sweet friend, it could not be that you should love me so much as I do you! Woman cannot so love man as man loves woman. For the love of the woman is in her eye and upon the nipple of her breast, and upon the tip of her foot; but the love of the man

is planted within the heart whence it cannot get forth.'

There while Aucassin and Nicolette were speaking together, down the street came the town-guard, and they had their swords drawn under their cloaks, for the Count Garin had charged them, if they could take her, that they should kill her. And the warder who was on the tower saw them coming, and heard that they went talking of Nicolette, and that they were threatening to slay her.

'God!' said he, 'how great a loss were so fair a maiden were they to kill her! And very great kindness would it be if I could tell her by some means that they perceived not, and she be on her guard against them. For if they kill her then will Aucassin, my young lord, die, of whom grievous were the loss.'



Now one sings.

BRAVE the warder stood to view,
Valiant, wise, and courteous too.
He began to chant a rhyme,
Fair it went, and sweet to time:
‘Little maid, of heart so light,
Shaped so well, a comely sight,
Comely blond thy tresses show,
Grey thine eyes, thy face aglow;
Well I see, by that bright mien,
Thou hast with thy lover been,
Who for thee is like to die.
Listen, now, to what say I!
Let thy watch on traitors be
Who this way come seeking thee;
Under cloak do brands made bare
Grievous harm for thee prepare.
Lest with thee it soon go hard,
Be on thy guard!’

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

HA! said Nicolette, 'may the soul of thy father and of thy mother be in blessed repose, since so fairly and courteously thou hast given me word of it! If it please God, I will keep me well, and may God also guard me from them!'

She wraps herself in her cloak under shadow of the buttress till they have passed by: and she takes leave of Aucassin and goes her way until she is come to the castle-wall. The wall was battered about, and had been shored up; and she climbed thereby and made on until she was between the wall and the moat; and she looked down, and saw the moat very deep and sheer, and was sorely afraid.

'Ah, God,' said she, 'sweet Maker! If I let myself fall I shall break my neck; and if I remain here, to-morrow they will take me and burn me in a fire. Yet rather would I die here than that to-morrow all the folk should have me for a gaping-stock.'

On her brow she made the cross, and let herself slip down into the moat; and when she came to the bottom, her fair feet and fair hands, which had not recked how it might hurt them, were all bruised and broken, and the blood flowed from them freely in a dozen places:

nevertheless, she felt neither pain nor grief, because of the great fear that she had. And if she was in trouble over getting in, she was in yet greater about getting out. She bethought herself that to remain there was no good, and she found a sharp stake which those within had thrown for defending the castle, and made step-pings one above the other, and so climbed till by dint of great pains she reached the top.


Now the forest lay within two bow-shots, and covered a good thirty leagues in length and breadth; and in it were beasts, savage and serpentine. She was fearful that if she entered therein they would kill her: then again she thought that, if men found her there, they would bring her back into the town to burn.



Now one sings.

NICOLETTE, the bright of brow,
Up the fosse has mounted now,
And her sore distress to show
Unto Christ her prayer lets go:
'Father, King of Majesty,
Now know I no way to flee;
If I go to forest-bower,
Wolves will surely me devour,
Lions also, and wild-boars,—
Many a one there runts and roars.
If I wait till day be clear,
So that they can find me here,
Then the fires will lighted grow
Where my body burned must go.
But, by God's high Majesty,
Sooner would I have it be
That the wolves my body tore,
And the lion and wild-boar,
Than into the city hie!
That will not I!'

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

 ICOLETTE bewailed her full bitterly, even as you have heard. She commended herself to God, and fared forth till she came into the forest. She dared not go deep in it for fear of the wild beasts and the serpents; so she hid herself in a dense thicket, and sleep took her; and she slept till the full prime of the next day, when the herd-boys came forth from the town and drove their beasts between the wood and the river. And they betook themselves apart to a most beautiful spring which was on the edge of the forest, and spread a cloak, and on that put their bread. While they were eating, Nicolette was awakened by the cries of the birds and of the shepherds, and she hastened towards them.

‘Fair children,’ said she, ‘the Lord God be your aid!’

‘God bless you!’ said the one who was more ready of tongue than the rest.

‘Fair children,’ said she, ‘know you Aucassin, the son of the Count Garin of Beaucaire?’

‘Yes, we know him well.’

‘So may God help you, fair children,’ said she; ‘tell him that there is a beast in this forest, and that he is to come and hunt it; and if he can take it, he would not part with one limb of it for a hundred gold marks, nay, not for five hundred, nor for any price.’

And they looked at her and saw her so beautiful that they were all astonished.

‘I tell him?’ said he that was more ready of tongue than the rest. ‘Sorrow be his who shall ever speak of it, or who shall ever tell him! This is a phantom that you tell of, for there is no such costly beast in this forest, neither stag, nor lion, nor wild-boar, whereof a single limb were worth more than two pence or three at the most: and you speak of so big a price! Evil be to him who credits your tale, or who ever shall tell it him. You are a fay, and we have no care for your company; you keep your own path!’

‘Ah, fair children!’ said she; ‘you will do this! The beast holds such a medicine that Aucassin will be cured of his wound. And I have here five sous in my purse; take them and tell him! And within three days ought he to hunt; and if, in three days, he find it not, never will he be cured of his wound.’

‘By my faith!’ said he, ‘we will take the money; and if he come hither we will tell him; but never will we go to look for him!’

‘In God’s name!’ says she.

Then she takes leave of the herd-boys, and goes her way.

Now one sings.

NICOLETTE, with brow so sweet,
From the herd-boys turned her feet,
And, her path set forth upon,
Deep in leafy woods was gone,
Where the track grew faint and wan;
Till she came upon a place
Where the road by seven ways
Thence through all the country ran.
So to thinking she began
How her lover she might prove
By his word to be her love.
Stems of field-lilies she broke,
And the leafage of the oak,
And with other leaves as well
Shaped thereof a dainty cell;
Ne'er was seen so sweet before.
And by God's own Truth she swore,
Should Aucassin chance that way,
And for love of her not stay,
Nor to rest awhile agree,
Ne'er shall he her lover be,
Nor his love she.

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.



NICOLETTE had made the cell, even as you have heard and had it told, very fair and very fit, and had decked it well without and within with flowers and with leaves. And she laid herself down hard by the cell, in a close thicket, to know what Aucassin would do.

And the cry and the rumour went throughout the land and through all the country that Nicolette was lost. Some say that she is fled away, and some say that the Count Garin of Beaucaire has caused her to be slain. Whosoever had joy of it Aucassin was not glad. And the Count Garin, his father, had him taken out of prison; and he summoned the knights and the ladies of the land, and let make a mighty rich feast wherewith he thought to comfort Aucassin his son.

While the feast was at its height, Aucassin stood leaning upon a balcony, all sad and cheerless: whosoever felt joy, Aucassin had no mood for it, for naught saw he there of the thing he loved. A knight looked at him, and came up to him, and addressed him:

‘Aucassin,’ said he, ‘from the same cause of sickness that you have, have I been sick. I will give you good counsel if you have the will to believe me.’

‘Sir,’ said Aucassin, ‘gramercy! Good counsel would I hold dear!’

‘Get on a horse,’ says he, ‘and go along yonder forest to cheer you! and you will see the flowers and the herbs, and you will hear the small birds sing. Peradventure you will hear some word for which you will be the better.’

‘Sir,’ says Aucassin, ‘gramercy! That will I do!’

He slips out of the hall and goes down the stair, and comes to where his horse was in stable. He bids put on the saddle and bridle, he sets foot to stirrup and mounts, and goes forth from the castle. And he wandered on till he came to the forest, and so rode till he came to the spring, and finds the herd-boys at the hour of None. And they had a cloak spread out on the grass, and were eating their bread and making very merry.



Now one sings.

Now the herd-boys come about,
Esmer's lad and Martin's lout,
Fruelin and little John,
Robin's son and Auberon.
Said the one, 'Fair fellowship,
Aucassin, I pray God keep!
Faith! a pretty youth for show,
And the well-clad maid also,
She that had the blondy hair,
Open face and eyes of vair:
Nor did she her pence deny,
Out of which we cakes can buy,
Also knives in cases set,
Cornet, too, and flageolet,
Bagpipes, too, and shepherd's clubs.
God heal his rubs!'

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

WHEN Aucassin heard the shepherds, he called to mind Nicolette, his most sweet friend, whom he so loved, and he bethought him that she had been there; and he set spurs to his horse, and came to the herd-boys.

‘Fair children, God be your aid!’

‘God bless you!’ said he that was more ready of tongue than the rest.

‘Fair children,’ said he, ‘say again the song that you were saying just now!’

‘We will not say it!’ said he that was more ready of tongue than the rest. ‘Sorrow be his now who shall sing it for you, fair sir!’

‘Fair children,’ said Aucassin, ‘do you not know me?’

‘Yes, we know well that you are Aucassin, our young lord; but we are not yours, we are the Count’s.’

‘Fair children, you will do this, I pray you!’

‘Od’s heart, hearken!’ quoth he. ‘Why should I sing for you if it suit me not?—when there is no man so rich in this country, except the Count Garin in his own body, who if he found my oxen or my cows or my sheep in his fields or in his corn would be so hardy toward having his eyes scored out, as to dare drive them from it. And so why should I sing for you if it suit me not?’

‘So may God be your aid, fair children, you will do so! And take ten sous which I have here in a purse!’

‘Sir, the money will we take; but I will not sing to you, for I am sworn of it; but I will tell it you if you wish.’

‘In God’s name!’ said Aucassin. ‘I would rather have it told than nothing.’

‘Sir, we were here just now, between Prime and Tierce, and were eating our bread by this spring, even as we do now. And a maiden came here, the most beautiful thing in the world, so that we believed her to be a fairy, and this whole wood was bright with her. And she gave us of that she had so much that we made covenant with her, if you came here, to tell you that you should go hunting in this forest, where there is a beast which, if you could take it, you would not part with one of its limbs for five hundred marks of silver, nor for any price; for the beast holds such a medicine that if you can catch it you will be cured of your wound. And within three days were you to have caught it; and if you have not caught it never will you see it again. Now hunt it if you will, or, if you will, leave it, for I have quit myself well of it towards her.’

‘Fair children,’ said Aucassin, ‘enough have you told thereof, and God grant me to find it!’

Now one sings.

AUCASSIN the words heard say
Of his dear and dainty may;
Deep they entered to his heart,
From the herds he paced apart,
To the deep woods went with speed;
Quick beneath him stepped his steed,
At a gallop bore him well.
Then spake he, three words to tell:
'Nicolette, of dainty shape,
I for you to woods escape;
Neither stag nor boar I chase,
'Tis for you the track I trace.
Your grey eyes, and dainty show,
Your bright laugh, and words so low,
My poor heart have brought to death.
But if so God wills me breath,
You once more my eyes shall meet,
Friend, sister, sweet!'



Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.



AUCASSIN ranged through the forest from path to path, and his charger bore him on at a great pace. Think not that the briars and the thorns spared him! Never at all; but so did they tear his raiment that scarcely could one anywhere have joined it across; and the blood ran from his arms, and his sides, and his legs in forty places, or thirty, so that after the youth one might follow the traces of blood which fell upon the grass. But he thought so much on Nicolette, his sweet friend, that he felt neither pain nor grief; and he ranged all day through the forest by such ways that never did he get news of her. And when he saw that the evening approached, he began to weep because he found her not.

All down an old grass-grown path he was riding, when he looked before him in the mid-way and saw a youth of such sort as I will tell you. Big-grown was he, and a marvel, ugly and ill favoured. He had a great tuft-head blacker than charcoal, and more than a hand's breadth between his two eyes; and he had vast cheeks and a huge flat nose, and great splay nostrils, and thick lips redder than a broiled collop, and big teeth yellow and ugly. And he was shod in leggings and shoes of bull's hide bound with

bark to above the knee; and he was clothed in a cape wrong on both sides, and was leaning on a great club.

Aucassin made haste towards him, and was greatly afraid when he took stock of him.

‘Fair brother, God be thine aid!’

‘God bless you!’ said he.

‘So may God help thee, what art thou doing here?’

‘What is that to you?’ said he.

‘Nothing,’ said Aucassin; ‘I ask you not but with good intent.’

‘But wherefore are you weeping?’ said he, ‘and making such a grievous to-do? Surely, were I as rich a man as you are, all the world would not make me weep.’

‘Heh! but do you know me?’ said Aucassin.

‘Yes, I know well that you are Aucassin, the son of the Count; and if you tell me wherefore you are weeping, I will tell you what I am doing here.’

‘Certes,’ said Aucassin, ‘I will tell you full willingly. This morning I came to hunt in this forest, and I had a white greyhound, the most beautiful on earth, and I have lost it. For this am I weeping.’

‘To hear,’ said he, ‘by the heart our Lord had in His body, that you wept for a stinking hound! Ill grief befall him who shall ever again take account of you, when there is no man so rich in this land but, if your father asked of him ten or fifteen or twenty, he would have render-

ed them too willingly and been only too glad!
But I ought to weep and make dole.'

'And for what cause thou, brother?'

'Sir, I will tell you. I was hired to a rich farmer, and I drove his plough; four oxen there were to it. Now three days since there happened to me a great misadventure, whereby I lost the finest of my oxen, Roger, the best of my team. And him I go seeking, and have neither eaten nor drunk these three days past. And I dare not go to the town lest they should put me in prison, since I have not wherewith to pay for it. Of all the wealth of the world I have nothing of more worth than you see on my body. A meagre mother had I, and she had naught of worth above a poor mattress, and that they have taken from under her back, and she lies on the bare straw; and I am weighed down a deal more about that than about myself. For wealth comes and goes: if now I have lost, I shall gain another time, and shall pay for my ox when I can, nor ever for this will I be a-weeping. And you wept for a dirty dog! Ill grief befall him who shall ever again take count of you!'

'Certes, thou art of good comfort, fair brother; may thou be blessed! And how much was thine ox worth?'

'Sir, twenty sous are demanded of me for it; I cannot get abatement of a single mite.'

'Now take,' said Aucassin, 'the twenty which I have here in my purse, and pay for thine ox.'

‘Sir,’ said he, ‘mighty thanks! And may God grant you find that which you seek.’

He parts from him, and Aucassin rides on. The night was fair and still, and he wandered on till he came hard by to where the seven ways branched, and saw before him the wattled lodge which Nicolette had made; and the cell was decked without and within, and above and before with flowers, and was so fair that more so it could not be.

When Aucassin perceived it, he stopped all at once; and the rays of the moon shone into it.

‘Ah, God!’ cried Aucassin, ‘here was Nicolette, my sweet friend, and this made she with her beautiful hands. For the sweetness of her, and for the love, here will I alight now, and lay me there for the rest of this night.’

He drew his foot out of the stirrup to light down, and the horse was great and high. He thought so much on Nicolette, his most sweet friend, that he fell against a stone so heavily that his shoulder flew out of joint. He knew himself sorely damaged, but he strove as best he was able, and with his other hand he fastened his horse to a thorn. And he turned himself on his side, so that he came backwards into the lodge. And he looked through the trellis of the cell and saw the stars in heaven; and he saw one of them there brighter than the rest, and he began to say:

Now one sings.

LITTLE star, I yonder see,
Stepping with the moon thro' air,
Nicolette is there with thee,
My small love with locks so fair.
God, methinks, hath made her leave
Earth to be the star of eve.
Whatsoever fate might send,
Would I were with thee so high!
Close I'd kiss thee without end;
Though a king's own son were I,
Surely you for me were meet,
Friend, sister, sweet!

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.



WHEN Nicolette heard Aucassin, she came to him, for she was not far off. She entered into the lodge, and threw her arms about his neck, and kissed and clasped him.

‘Fair sweet friend, well found be you!’

‘And you, fair sweet friend, be you, too, well found!’

They kissed each other and embraced, and their joy was beautiful.

‘Ah! sweet friend,’ said Aucassin, ‘I was but now sorely wounded in my shoulder, and now I feel neither pain nor grief since I have you!’

She handled him and found that he had his shoulder out of joint. And she so managed and drew it to place with her white hands, that, as God willed who loveth lovers, it came back to its setting. And then she took flowers, and fresh grass, and green leaves, and bound them on with the hem of her smock, and he was all healed.

‘Aucassin,’ said she, ‘fair sweet friend, take counsel what you will do. If your father tomorrow bids search this forest, and they find me, whatever may become of you, they will slay me.’

‘Certes, fair sweet friend, I should be sore

grieved at that! But if I have power, they shall never get hold of you.'

He mounted on his horse and took his friend up in front of him, kissing and embracing; and they fared forth toward the open plain.

Now one sings.

AUCASSIN, the fair, the bright,
 The amorous, the gentle knight,
 From the deep wood issuing out
 Claspeth arms his love about:
 Where on saddle-bow she lies,
 Fast he kisses brow and eyes,
 Kisses mouth and kisses chin.
 She, the while, lets speech begin:
 'Aucassin, my fair sweet friend,
 To what land are we to wend?'
 'Sweet and dear, what do I know?
 Naught to me is where we go;
 Track or forest let us ride,
 So but I with you may bide!'
 On they fare by vale and down,
 Pass by borough and by town,
 Till at dawn the sea they scanned,
 And there 'lighted where the land
 Became the strand.

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.



AUCASSIN had lighted down, both he and his friend, as you have heard and had it told. He held his horse by the bridle and his friend by the hand, and they began to go along the seashore.

And Aucassin saw a ship that was sailing by, and could see that there were merchants upon it, for they were quite close to the shore. And he summoned them and they came to him; and he made such terms with them that they took him into their ship.

And when they were on the high sea a storm rose, mighty and marvellous, which bore them from land to land till they were come to a strange country, and entered the port of the Castle of Torelore.

Then they asked what land that was, and they were told that it was the land of the King of Torelore.

Then asked he what manner of man that was, and had he wars; and they told him:

‘Yea, great!’

Then he took leave of the merchants, and they commended him to God. He mounts on his horse with his sword girt on, and his friend before him, and made on until he was come to the castle. He demanded where the king was, and they told him he was lying in child-bed.

‘And where, then, is his wife?’

And they told him that she was in the field, and had led thither the whole force of the country.


And Aucassin heard it, and it seemed to him a great marvel. And he came to the palace and lighted down, both he and his friend, and she held his horse, and he went up into the palace with his sword girt, and fared on till he came to the chamber where the king lay in child-bed.

Now one sings.

COURTEOUS to the chamber sped
Aucassin, the gentle bred.
Straight he to the couch did win,
Where the king was lying-in.
There in front of him stopped he
Thus to speak—now hearken ye!
'Fool, what folly here gets done?'
Quoth the king, 'I bear a son.
When my month is at an end,
And I'm well upon the mend,
Then to hear mass shall I go,
As my ancestors did so,
And my great wars to maintain,
March against my foes again,
Till none remain.'



Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

HEN Aucassin heard the King talk in such a fashion, he took all the bed-clothes which were upon him, and hurled them down the chamber. He saw at his back a cudgel; so, taking it, he turns him about, and beat and battered him till he was like to have killed him.

‘Ah! fair sir,’ cried the King, ‘what do you want of me? Are you out of your senses that you beat me in my own house?’

‘By God’s heart!’ quoth Aucassin, ‘you ill-gotten son of a good-for-nothing, I will kill you if you do not swear to me that never again shall a man in your country go lying in child-bed!’

So he swore to him; and when he had sworn it:

‘Sir,’ said Aucassin, ‘now take me to where your wife is in the field!’

‘Sir, willingly!’ said the King.

He mounts on a horse, and Aucassin mounts on his, and Nicolette stayed in the Queen’s chambers. And the king and Aucassin rode away till they came where the Queen was; and they found that the battle was of roasted crab-apples and eggs, and fresh cheeses.

And Aucassin began to watch them, and thereon marvelled he full hard.

Now one sings.

AUCASSIN has stopped, and so,
Leaning on his saddle-bow,
He begins to see aright
All the pitch and toss of fight.
They had brought in warlike zest
Rounds of cheeses freshly pressed,
Wild wood-apples roasted soft,
Rank horse-mushrooms from the croft;
Who at fords most mud can stir
They proclaim the vanquisher.
Aucassin, the valiant knight,
Set to gaze on such a sight,
Laughed outright.

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.



WHEN Aucassin beheld this marvel, he came to the King and spake to him.

‘Sir,’ said Aucassin, ‘are these here your enemies?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said the King.

‘And would you that I should avenge you of them?’

‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I would willingly.’

And Aucassin sets hand to sword, and hurls himself among them, and begins to smite right and left, and kills many of them.

And when the King saw that he was killing them, he took him by the bridle, and said:

‘Ah! fair sir, do not kill them in such fashion!’

‘How!’ said Aucassin, ‘do you grudge I should avenge you?’

‘Sir,’ said the King, ‘too much have you done of it! It is not at all the custom for us to kill one another.’

These turned to flight, and the King and Aucassin fare back to the Castle of Torelore.

And the people of the country tell the King to drive Aucassin out of his territory, and to keep Nicolette with his son, since she seemed indeed a lady of high lineage.

And Nicolette heard it, and was nowise glad thereat, and she began to say:

Now one sings.

‘**K**ING, and lord of Torelore,
Spake fair Nicolette at last,
‘Fool your people take me for.
When my sweet friend holds me fast,
Clasps and finds me soft and round,
Then to school am I so bound,
Paces, graces, dance-array,
Harps and viols making gay,
Jigs and mirth at nimpole play
May all away!’

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.



AUCASSIN dwelt at the Castle of Torelore, and Nicolette, his friend, in great ease and pleasantness, for he had with him Nicolette, his sweet friend, whom he so loved. Now while he was in such ease and in such pleasantness, a fleet of Saracens came by sea, and laid siege to the castle, and took it by main force. They took the booty, and carried away the men and women captives. They took Nicolette and Aucassin, and they bound Aucassin hand and foot, and cast him into one ship and Nicolette into another.


And on sea there arose a storm which separated them. The ship in which was Aucassin went drifting so far across sea that it came to the Castle of Beaucaire; and the people of the country ran to the wreck and found Aucassin, and recognised him.

And when they of Beaucaire beheld their young lord they made great joy over him, for Aucassin had dwelt at the Castle of Torelore a good three years, and his father and his mother were dead. They brought him to the Castle of Beaucaire, and became all his men; and he held his land in peace.

Now one sings.

THUS was Aucassin set down
At Beaucaire, his native town;
Through that realm and countryside
Everywhere did rest abide.
By the might of God he sware
That his heart had deeper care
For the fair-browed Nicolette,
Than for all his kin, though yet
They in life no more had share.
'Thee, sweet friend, so bright of brow,
Where to seek I know not now!
Never realm hath God made be
But by land or over sea,
If I thought to find thee there,
I'd thither fare!'

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

ow we will let go of Aucassin, and will tell of Nicolette. The ship, in which Nicolette was, belonged to the King of Carthage; the same was her father, and she had twelve brothers, or princes or kings.


When they beheld Nicolette so beautiful, they offered her very great honour, and made a feast for her. And much they inquired of her who she might be, for indeed she seemed a right noble lady of high lineage. But she knew not how to tell them who she was, since as a small child she had been carried away.

They sailed on till they were come beneath the city of Carthage; and when she saw the walls of the castle, and the country, she recognised that it was there she had been nursed, and thence taken when a small child. But not so small a child was she that she did not know well how she had been the daughter to the King of Carthage, and that she had been brought up in the city.

Now one sings.

NICOLETTE of wit and worth
Now is come to ends of earth;
Sees the buildings and the walls,
And the palaces and halls.
All whereof she makes lament.
'Woe is me, my high descent!
King's daughter of Carthage town,
Cousin to an Emir's crown!
Savage folk here hold me prize.
Aucassin, well-born and wise,
Fair lord, honourably placed,
Your sweet love so bids me haste,
Calls and gives me such great care;
God the Spirit grant my prayer—
Yet to hold in my embrace
You, and have you kiss my face,
Mouth and all around, above,
Fair lord, liege-love!'

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

HEN the King of Carthage heard Nicolette speak thus, he threw his arms about her neck. 'Fair sweet friend,' said he, 'tell me who you are! Do not be afraid of me!'

'Sir,' said she, 'I am daughter to the King of Carthage, and was carried away, a small child, full fifteen years ago.'

When they heard her speak after this fashion, they knew well that she told the truth, and they made full great rejoicings over her, and led her into the palace in great honour as being the king's daughter. For lord they willed to give her a king of Paynim: but she had no heart to wed.

She was there full three days or four. And she bethought her by what device she would be able to go in quest of Aucassin. She purchased a viol and learned to play thereon, till they would have her one day be married to a king, a rich Paynim. And that night she stole forth, and came to the sea-port, and took shelter at the house of a poor woman upon the shore.

And she took a certain herb, and therewith smeared she her head and face, so that she was all dark and stained. And she let make coat and mantle and shirt and breeches, and fitted herself in the guise of a minstrel. And she took

her viol, and went to a skipper, and made such terms with him that he took her on to his ship. They hoisted their sails and passed over the high seas until they were come to the land of Provence. And Nicolette set forth and took her viol, and went playing through the country till she came to the Castle of Beaucaire, where Aucassin then was.

Now one sings.

AT BEAUCAIRE, the tower below,
 Aucassin did one day go;
 There upon a terrace set,
 Round him his bold barons met.
 Grass and flowers he sees spring,
 And he hears the small birds sing;
 Whom he loves he calls to mind,
 Nicolette, the maiden kind,
 His dear love of many a day;
 Then to sighs and tears gives way.
 See, then, Nicolette below
 Brings her viol, brings her bow,
 And with speech her tale has told,
 ‘Hark to me, ye barons bold,
 Ye on ground and ye on height!
 Would you hear a song recite,
 Aucassin, the gentle knight,
 Nicolette, the valiant fair,
 How long time their love did wear?’

How went search through forest shade,
How, at Torelore when stayed,
Ta'en one day by Paynim foe.
Naught of Aucassin we know;
But the valiant Nicolette
Is in Carthage Castle set,
Tended by her father's hand,
Who is lord of all that land.
Her in marriage would they bring
Felon lord, of pagans king.
Nicolette cares naught for none,
Lordling dear, she loves but one—
Aucassin the name he bears;
And by God's own name she swears,
Ne'er with baron will she plight,
If he be not her true knight
And dear delight.'

Now they tell and narrate and the tale goes on.

WHEN Aucassin heard Nicolette speak thus, he was most glad of heart, and he drew her on one side and asked her: 'Fair sweet friend,' said Aucassin, 'know you nought of this Nicolette of whom you have just now sung?'

'Sir, yes! I know of her as the most noble creature, and the most gentle and the most wise that ever was born. And she is daughter to the king of Carthage, who took her when Aucassin was taken, and brought her to the city of Carthage, whereafter he learned verily that she was his daughter, and made full great rejoicings thereat. And every day did they will to give her for lord one of the highest kings in all Spain. But she would rather let herself be hanged or burned than take any one of them, however rich he might be.'

'Ah! fair sweet friend,' said the Count Aucassin, 'if you would go back to that land, and would tell her to come and speak to me, I would give you of my substance as much as you would dare to ask or take. And know that for the love of her I have no will to take a wife, let her be of never so high lineage, but will wait for her; nor will I ever have a wife if I have not her. And if I had known where to find her, I should not have now to be seeking her.'

'Sir,' said she, 'if you would do this, I would

go in quest of her for your sake, and for hers, whom I love much.'

He pledges her his word, and then he bids give her twenty pounds. She parts from him; and he weeps for the sweetness of Nicolette. And when she beholds him weeping:

'Sir,' says she, 'be not dismayed, since in a little while I shall have brought her to you into this town; so will you behold her.'

And when Aucassin heard it, he was full glad of it; and she departs from him, and fares into the town to the house of the Viscountess, for the Viscount, her god-father, was dead. There she took shelter, and held speech with her until she had revealed to her her business. And the Viscountess knew her again, and learned for a truth that it was Nicolette, whom she had brought up.

And she let her be washed and bathed and lodged there a full eight days. And she took a certain herb which was called eye-wort, and anointed herself with it, and she was as beautiful as ever she had been at any day. And she clothed herself in rich silk-cloth, of which the lady had store, and she sat herself in the chamber on a silken quilt; and she called the lady and told her to go for Aucassin her friend. And she did so.

And when she came to the palace she found Aucassin, who was weeping and sorrowing after Nicolette, his beloved, for that she delayed so long. And the lady spake to him and said: 'Aucassin, now bewail yourself no longer, but come

you on with me, and I will show you the thing in the world that you love most, for it is Nicolette, your sweet friend, who from far-off lands is come seeking you.'

And Aucassin was glad.

Now one sings.

Now when Aucassin heard say
 That his dear and dainty may
 Had in that land come to be,
 Glad as ne'er before was he.
 With the dame he wends his way
 To the house, nor may he stay
 Till they to the chamber get
 Where within sat Nicolette.
 When the sight of him she had
 Never was her heart so glad;
 Up she leapt and t'wards him ran.
 And when sight had Aucassin,
 Both his arms to her went out,
 Soft embraced her all about,
 While he kissed her eyes and face;
 Thus they stayed the whole night's space.
 And when morn made morrow there,
 Aucassin did wed the fair
 To be Lady of Beaucaire.
 Then did they through many days
 Lead a life of joyous ways;
 Now has Aucassin his bliss,
 Also Nicolette's is his.
 Sung and said, the tale is o'er:
 I know no more.

THE STORY OF AMABEL
AND AMORIS




THE STORY OF AMABEL
AND AMORIS

IF for tales of love ye be,
Listen, lovers all, to me!
Through the world I've journeyed far,
Seeking where true lovers are:
And where'er I ranged on ground
Cupid's covers have I found.
Out of roots, and rocks, and trees,
Fields, and flocks, I gathered these:
Grass I cropped with Cupid's herds,
Now is grown a crop of words;
Grapes of grief in Cupid's cup,
Wine of verse now brimmeth up;
Kisses sown in Cupid's sleep,
Rhymèd reason runs to reap.
Therefore, lovers, this tale is
Of Amabel and Amoris,

Who, from the beginning friends
Came at last to lovers' ends;
Whence the tale may backward run,
Lovers' ends being life begun.
And for all that this tale tells
Let your ears be honey-cells!
But go hence, ye loveless lot,
Unbegun and unbegot,
Till ye bear the Bowman's shot,
I'll know you not!

Now they say and narrate and the tale is told.

ow Amoris, son and heir to the Duke of Angardy, was returned from the wars to his father's castle at Angars, sick and sore wounded. Thereto had he done many deeds of arms, and made his name so great and famous, that, if it were told of him that he was so much as ten leagues away, towns began to wish they were villages, and castles they were sheep-pens; so sure was he to lay siege to and storm all places that put themselves behind walls, and to spare poor hovels wherein lived none but cow-herds, and poor people, and simple folk without any substance.

And as he lay upon his bed by a window that looked out over a garden wherein were many flowers and trees in which the small birds sang, he heard a most sweet voice that he thought to be of some maiden; and she sang with no notes, but, it seemed, out of the gladness of her heart only. And Amoris was too weak, with all his wounds and his sickness, to rise and look out and see who it was that sang with such a sweet voice. But he bethought him, when the song was done, that he was more healed by the sound of it than by all the leeches in his father's realm since he had come back from the wars. He had seven wounds in his body, and it was three months or more since he had taken them in

fight: and not one of them would heal because of his sickness. But it seemed to him that one of them had healed since he had heard the voice of the maiden who sang in the garden under his window. So he said to himself: 'If she will but come again to-morrow, and for five days after, I shall be healed of all my wounds, and shall be able to marry Alis, that noble lady, whom I have not seen, but whom my father wills me to wed. Nathless, I would rather have a hundred wounds in my body, and lie here and be healed of them one by one by so sweet a voice, than marry all the Alises in the world, however fair and noble they may be!'

Now the maiden whose voice he had heard was a milkmaid who came each day with goat's milk to the castle; and she was foster-sister to Amoris, and had been with him when a child, and remembered him since. But Amoris had forgotten her. And her name was Amabel.

Now they sing.

AMORIS on sick-bed laid
A Heard go by the minstrel-maid:
Neither viol nor lute she had,
But within her heart was glad;
And for cheer her heart had strings,
Words thereto grew like to wings;
And each day her song anew
Up towards his window flew;
Thus it went,—I tell it through:
'While the sun is still at sea
Soft the twilight wakens me;
Then, ere dawn the world uncoats,
To the fields I take my goats;
When I've wrung their udders down,
Quick I bring my milk to town.
And as thus I do each day,
'Tis to Mary's Son I pray,
That my young lord Amoris
May get health of drinking this,
So sweet it is!'

Now they say and narrate and the tale is told.



MORIS waited till the next day, hoping that he might hear the sweet voice singing in the garden below; and he listened to hear the words. And the next day, very early in the morning, soon after it was light, came Amabel, the goat-maid, even as she had done before, and sang as she went under his window. And Amoris heard the words.

And after he had heard the song, it seemed to him that yet another of his seven wounds was more healed than it had been by all the leeches in his father's realm since he had come back from the wars. But because of his five remaining wounds, and of his sickness, he could not rise to look out and see who she was, or of what favour, that sang so sweetly.

But when the leech came that same day with salves and fresh bandages to bind up the wounds of Amoris, he found that two of the wounds were already healed. Then would he have Amoris to take the draught which he had prepared for him because of his sickness; but Amoris made oath that he would drink nothing save goat's milk so long as his sickness lasted. And when the leech besought him not to do any such folly, Amoris spake to him thus:

'Master Leech,' said he, 'have you a head upon your shoulders!'

‘Sir, yes!’ said the leech.

‘Look you, then,’ said Amoris, ‘it shall be off them so soon as I have strength to handle sword, if you do not that which I ask, and bring me naught to drink save the goat’s milk which is brought here each day by a young maid, who herself rises before the sun is off the sea, and milks her goats, and brings the milk to the town to sell it. For if all the rivers in the world ran with the best wine that ever came out of grape I would not drink it, but goat’s milk only!’

‘Sir,’ said the leech, ‘I see you will have it even as you say; and when you are dead, I shall be hanged for it!’

So Amoris drank goat’s milk only, and in a while began to be quite cured of his sickness. And when by the song of Amabel, the goat-maid, he had been healed of all his wounds, and had purged him of his sickness by drinking naught but the goat’s milk which she brought each day into the castle, then he rose up off his bed and looked out of his window to see her whose sweet singing had been his cure.

And it was early morning, when few folk were abroad; but the birds had begun to be loud in all the thickets, and the dew was still grey on all the herbs and trees; and on one side of the world was sunlight, and the rest was in shadow, for the sun was scarcely yet risen.

And Amoris saw the goat-maid as she came under the castle wall; and she was so beautiful

that he marvelled at her. She had grey eyes, and her lips were like a young rose, and her hair was long and full of ripples as a brook over a bed of pebbles, and her face was like a peach fresh picked. And she was so young that she seemed only that day to have come to woman's estate.

And when Amoris saw her so, and the white milk in her pail, and the track of her feet in the dew over the way by which she had come, and saw the world about her like fresh wax that had been moulded in the sun, and heard the loud singing of the birds in the thickets, and the noise of the herds on the hills, then all these things entered like arrows into his heart, and stayed there, making a sweet malady which could not be cured. So Amoris looked at her and became glad.

Now they sing.

AMORIS, the gentle knight,
Looks forth from the castle's height:
Through the silver fields below
Sees the flower of maidens go;
And with plaintive voice and gay
Straightway he begins to say:
'Maiden, who o'ersteps the morn,
Well is me that I was born!
God, who gave me eyes to see,
Gave that they might look on thee!
Now know I that earth and air
Are for me no longer fair,
If I may not find thee there.
Never mirth may sound with morn,
Never hound may hark to horn,
Never song be set to tune,
Never cup be drained at noon,
Never rest be had at night,
If I had not thee for sight,
And dear delight!'

Now they narrate and sing and the tale is told.



MABEL underneath the castle walls heard the singing of Amoris, though she heard not the words. And she knew his voice again as though it were her own, so well she remembered it. And because of his singing, she was glad and looked up: and Amoris at his window looked down on her, and their eyes met; and neither of them could speak a word.

Now there was at the Castle of Angars an old dame that had been gentlewoman to the Duchess until her death, and governess to Amoris. She came to the young lord's chamber, and found him joyful and sad, both together in one breath, and for no cause that could be shown. So she looked at him, and she began to say:

‘My lord Amoris, it is very well that you are so properly cured of your sickness, for now shall that marriage soon be which your father wills you to make with the lady Alis; and they say of her that she is so fair that you have only to see her to be happy.

‘Dame,’ said Amoris, ‘with Alis I will not wed; for her I have never seen, and it is not she that has cured me of my sickness and brought me back to life, but it is the goat-girl who brings milk every day to the castle; she has done all

these things. And to look at her God gave me these two eyes in my head, and to speak of her He gave me a tongue, and to hold her as my own He made my hands strong, and to lift her above the head of any other He made me be son to a Duke. And I know this, that I would rather my body were full of wounds, that every day she might heal one of them, than marry all the Alises in the world, however fair and noble they might be!

‘Sir,’ said the dame, ‘you are in sickness still if you speak so; and if your father heard the like, you might well catch your death of it.’

‘Dame,’ said Amoris, ‘I can do no other than I say. Love is so deep a well that after one draught of it nothing else is to a man’s taste.’

‘Dear son and master,’ said the dame, ‘I have been tender to you these twenty years, ever since your own mother died; and have I once bidden you do a thing that was not to your advantage?’

‘I think never,’ said Amoris.

‘Sir,’ said she, ‘then do one thing more, and afterwards you shall be free of me.’

‘What is that?’ said Amoris.

‘Not far from here,’ said she, ‘lies the holy well where poor folk go to be healed of all their ills; and none goes but brings back some good of it. Now, therefore, do a wise thing! Take there this sickness of yours, and wash your eyes and your hands and every part of you, and pray

to be set free from the malady that has hold of your heart, which, if you father the Duke hear of it, may well be your death.'

'If I go,' said Amoris, 'do not think I will pray for anything but what with all my heart I must needs wish.'

'Do that!' said the other. So he promised, and they parted; and Amoris set forth on his way to the place of which she had told him.

Now they sing.

AMORIS with love for load
Setteth forth upon his road;
And to Heaven he makes his vow,
And he goes to wash him now.
If from him the holy well
Washes thought of Amabel,
Or do make him hold amiss
All the beauty and the bliss
Of her body's comeliness:
Then for prayer or praise will he
Nevermore bend down the knee,
Nor with life nor love agree,
Nor Heaven see!

Now they narrate and sing and the tale is told.



MORIS was come forth from the city-gate into the fields; and there at no great way from the walls sat Amabel, under the shadow of a tree, with her goats round her, because the day was hot. And she was thinking of Amoris, whom she remembered so well, and had seen again now after many years.

And when Amoris saw her he came fast, and kissed her once, twice, and thrice even; and could not speak for love. Therefore must Amabel think that he remembered her also, and who she was, and how they had been children together. So she told him the names of her goats, and all that had happened to her since the last day they had seen each other. And Amoris heard all that she said, yet it seemed to him as he hearkened that she was a Duke's daughter, and he only a goat-herd, so much did love exalt her.

And when she had finished, Amoris spake to her thus: 'Amabel, my dear delight, who have remembered me so well, of love little can I speak. But since your voice healed first one of my wounds, and then all, I have loved you even before I saw you. And now that I have set eyes on you, there is nothing else in the world that I love, save only through love of you. But my father wills that I should marry a lady of

high descent, named Alis, the daughter of a Count; and even now I am bound on an errand which is to take the thought of you out of my heart. But rather will I die than let it be! God shall not have my soul, if He give me not you to wed! Therefore bide here for me until I have fulfilled my word; then we will go far away together, where no man may hinder the love we bear to each other. Promise me, till then, that you will stay in this place.'

So she promised him, and they parted.

And Amoris went on till he came near to the holy well. And many pilgrims and lepers and lame men were coming that way also, meaning to be cured of their ills. But Amoris was the only one among them that went hoping not to be cured. And when he was come to the door of the church wherein the holy well lay, he saw there a cripple on two wooden legs and crutches standing. And the cripple went not in with the rest, but stood asking for alms. Then said Amoris to him: 'Brother, why do you stand asking alms, when there is here a holy well which cures all maladies, if so be one has a will to be healed? Maybe if you went in, God would grant you no longer to be lame.'

The man said: 'Fair brother, ten years since I came here a cripple in one leg only; one was of wood, but the other was of flesh and sound. And when I went down into the well I prayed that my legs might be restored to me as much a

pair as God could make them. So I prayed, and coming up out of the water I found I had two wooden legs instead of one! God be praised! That was a great miracle, was it not? So I stand here and ask alms, and increase men's faith when they hear my story.'

When Amoris heard that, he was quite glad, and gave the man full twenty pieces of silver. 'Certes,' said he, 'I hold this for a good omen! Now when I take my malady—even my love for Amabel—down to the water and bid it drink there and be healed, I trust God will increase it to me as he did the wooden legs of this poor cripple!'

Therewith went he in; and all round he saw upon the walls the signs of those that before him had been healed. There was no malady under the sun but had been healed there one day or another. So without more ado he prays God and all the saints to succour him, and goes down into the water, with his heart full of sickness for Amabel, his dear delight, whom he remembered so well.

Now they sing.

BLITHELY to the water went
Amoris, the well-content;
Like a bird that goes to fish,
Down he ducked to win his wish.
God and all the saints he prays:
'Rather let me end my days
Captive in a dungeon cell,
Than lose love of Amabel!
But if God will bring us fast
Unto lovers' ends at last,
Gladly here I render Him
All I have of life or limb:
Use of tongue whereby I talk,
Use of feet whereon I walk,
Use of hands wherewith I fight,
Use of eyes which bring me sight,
Use of me and all my might,
So I come to earn aright
My dear delight!'

Now they say and narrate and the tale is told.



As soon as Amoris had made an end of his prayer, he got him up from the well and stood as a man in a dream. Nor had he any longer the use of body or limbs or strength or speech to do aught save as another will should direct him. He went out of the church and into the square, where stood a crowd of pilgrims. And there forthwith he started to dance as nimbly as the best tumbler could do, and to turn somersaults, and to juggle and jape, till all round him folk began laughing aloud and throwing him their pence.

And Amoris, the noble knight, the courteous and brave, gathered up all the pence that were thrown, and put them in his pouch, and danced again merrily till the crowd tired of him. And when he was left alone he sat down for a while on the church-steps to rest; and by his side was the beggar with the two wooden legs.

‘Brother,’ said the beggar, ‘you seem merry after your dip.’

‘Brother,’ answered Amoris, ‘never had I more reason to be merry, for now I know that God has answered my prayer, and taken from me the use of all my members into His own keeping, to bring them to a good end.’

So presently he was got upon his feet again

and departed, going whatsoever way they might lead him. But said he: 'If it be God's will, now let these feet dance me back to where Amabel, my dear delight, waits for me. If they will but take me there, they shall have such dancing, I promise, as never before!' And so soon as he had spoken, his feet started to carry him back on the way by which he had come.

And when he was come near to the city, there under the tree sat Amabel, remembering his word, and waiting for his return. But not there would his feet stop for him, though much he wished it.

And as soon as Amabel saw how, without waiting, he was for passing her by, she cried out to him in reproach:

'Amoris, remember me; do not forget me so soon!'

And Amoris answered, 'Who are you, little goat-girl, that I should either remember you or forget you?'

Then she said, 'Dear friend, did you not bid me wait here till you should come to fetch me away?'

And Amoris answered, 'Did I ever say anything so foolish? You or I must be mad, little goat-girl, if we think it.' And therewith he had gone right past her and was come to the city gates.

Then in his heart he began to reproach himself bitterly, saying: 'Had I not chosen what

way I was to go, all this grief had not happened! Here now, against my own will, have I hurt the tenderest heart in the world, and the one that I love best, because my tongue has now another master, whose will it obeys! So let God's will be: I will ask no more favours.'

And sorrowing greatly, he came into the town, and saw all round him his father's folk, whom he knew well, and they him. And all were glad because their young lord was healed of his wounds. Then Amoris, that noble knight, put off his coat and cloak, and began to dance as nimbly as the best tumbler that ever stood on legs. And they were all amazed, and one or two went and told the Duke how that his son was dancing before all the people like a common tumbler. And when the Duke heard it there was more anger in him than he could hold.

He came out and saw his son Amoris capering before the crowd.

'Master clown,' said his father, 'what make you by this?'

'Sir,' said Amoris, 'I dance because so soon I am to be married to the lady I love.'

'Who is that?' said his father.

'Father,' said Amoris, 'she is a Duchess disguised as a goat-girl; and I left her but now under a tree outside in the fields. And all her ladies about her were goats, of gentle nurture and high descent—every one of them!'

‘God ’a’ mercy!’ said the Duke, ‘have I a madman for my son?’ And straightway he caused them to take Amoris, and put him in ward till his seizure should pass from him.

There leave we Amoris, and speak now of Amabel.

Now they sing.

WHEN the maid beholds how nigh
 Amoris goes dancing by,
 Sweet of speech she makes her plea,
 ‘Dear my lord, remember me!
 Fair of word, when last we met,
 Fair of heart, do not forget!
 Fairest lover, fairest lord,
 Fairest knight that ere drew sword,
 Hast thou put away so soon
 All thy will to be my boon?
 Bid me hide, or bid me show,
 Lift me high, or leave me low,
 Have me come, or have me go,
 Wish me weal, or wish me woe,
 Say me yes, or say me no:
 It shall be so!’

Now they say and narrate and the tale is told.

WHEN Amoris passed her by, refusing to stay or remember her, making answer to all she said as you have heard it told, then for a while was Amabel sore dismayed; for surely it seemed to her that the very thing had happened which he had prayed should not, seeing that he had come back from the holy well altogether forgetting her. Great sorrow was hers to think of it.

Then she remembered his words, and began doubting, and said thus to herself:

‘While he lives I will believe that he is true to his first word which he told me. Never till I die will I think that he has forgotten me. And now he has bidden me to stay here for him, and never has he bidden me go away. So here under this tree will I wait. Not if I live for a hundred years will I leave it except he tell me. And if Amoris, my friend, die, and I hear of it, I will not live another day, so much will my heart wish to lie down and be still where his is.’

And the night was come and was cold; and the stars made a soft light over the city and the fields; and the gates were shut; and Amabel was all alone. Now the tree under which she lay was hollow, so she climbed up through the openings below the boughs and crept in and

lay down, and was warm. Many days did Amabel rest there, under the tree by day, and within its hollow by night; and she thought much of Amoris, whom she remembered so well, and would not believe that he had forgotten her. And her goats strayed this way and that till they were all lost, because she could not go after them; so she was all alone.

But when three months were gone by, one night she lay awake within the tree; and the full moon shone high in the heavens, and in the moonlight there came a shepherd driving a flock of sheep. The shepherd was a fair youth, carrying a crook of green willow; all the leaves on it were fresh; and wherever he went his flock followed him.

He came to the tree where Amabel lay hidden, and he spake to her through the tree, with a sweet voice: 'Will you come and be one of my flock?'

Amabel, when she heard him speak so, looked out but a little way, and said she: 'I may not be of any flock, save if I have Amoris, my friend, with me, whom I remember so well.'

'Certes,' said the shepherd, 'then wait only one night more, and you shall have him! Then go where you will, and you shall find me.' And so saying, he departed, and Amabel was more happy than she knew.

Now they sing.

WHEN she heard the shepherd say
Amoris should pass that way,
Then was Amabel for glee
Like a linnet in the tree;
There sang she the whole day long,
Captive heart released in song:
'Amoris, from that high tower,
Hear you not a bird in bower,
One that sings the whole day through,
Waiteth here for love of you?
Though you had forgot me long,
Surely when you heard my song,
If your heart were cold and proud
Love would settle there like cloud,
Till forgetfulness grew vain,
And old joy came back again
Like summer rain!'

Now they say and narrate and the tale is told.



MORIS was in ward for three months or more, and never did his seizure leave him. All day long in his cell he tumbled and danced, and sang merrily of the goat-girl Duchess whom God willed that he should wed; and every day he longed greatly to know what had become of Amabel, his dear delight, whom he had left under the tree to wait for his return.

And every day, of his father's henchmen, one or two were set to watch over him and to guard him; by no way could he escape, even had he been master of his own goings. But never did he lose heart, or ask anything save to know of the welfare of Amabel, his most sweet friend and dear delight.

Now it happened one night that, when his guard was changed, there came two youths to the post; and one stood without at the door, and the other lay down within at the foot of the bed whereon Amoris lay. And presently this one slept fast; but Amoris lay awake. And all within it seemed to him the castle was full of music, and dancing, and soft voices that sang; he knew not whence could come so much happiness, nor the makers of it.

Then he saw in the moonlight which came by the window that the door stood open, and in

the doorway a fair youth that reached out a crook of green willow with all its leaves still fresh on it; and therewith he drew Amoris out of bed and set him upon his feet.

And when he had looked upon the fair youth, then from head to foot was Amoris fain to follow him. So they went out, and down the stairs, and into the court-yard, and to the gates, where lay the sentry all sleeping. And with his crook of green willow the youth drew open the gates, though they were all locked and barred, and led Amoris through, and so out of the town, and abroad into the fields, where for so long he had wished to be.

Now so soon as he was out of the city the youth left him, and Amoris found his feet free, and went his own way fast to the tree whereby he had last seen Amabel, his dear delight, sitting. But Amabel lay within the hollow of the tree asleep, and did not hear him coming; nor did he see her.

Then Amoris was full sorrowful when he found not Amabel, nor trace of her; but because of his promise which he had made to his feet, should they ever carry him to that spot, there began he to dance and to tumble as never before, and to sing aloud the most merry and plaintive ditty he could make. So presently Amabel awoke and looked out, and there was her dear friend, whom she remembered so well, dancing and singing under the tree where she

lay. And Amabel reached out her head and her two hands from the hollow of the tree, and caught him by the neck and kissed him.

‘Oh, wondrous nest!’ cried Amoris; ‘and what a bird!’ And, heart and lips, they were so glad they could say no more; nor ever beneath any tree, since Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, were lovers so happy as these.

Now they sing.

IN the tree-trunk hollowed deep,
 Amabel, lay down to sleep,
 Thereby seeth her dear lord
 Dance and gambol on the sward,
 While, with plaintive voice and gay,
 Loud he sings his heart away.
 From the hollow dark and dim
 Reaching out her arms to him,
 Round his neck she clasps him fast,
 Holds him to her breast at last.
 ‘Ah!’ cries he, where all was well
 On the heart of Amabel,
 ‘Wondrous nest! And what a bird!’
 Then not a word.

Now they say and narrate and the tale is told.



AND when they had made an end of embracing, Amabel said to Amoris: 'Now it is meet that we go and search out that shepherd, through whom all our joy is come to us, that we may become of his flock, as I promised him. Have no care what way we go, for without doubt we shall find him.'

So they wandered on, they knew not how, and came at dawn to the borders of a great forest, which covered a whole country—the Woods of Love was its name. Many had gone there and had not returned, so through all that countryside the place wore an ill-name. Nevertheless, there went Amabel and Amoris to search after the fair shepherd youth that bore the crook of green willow.

And as they went through the wood they came upon a youth bound to a tree; and his bare body was stuck all about with arrows, and around him lay others that had fallen short or gone aside; and at every one of his wounds he bled.

Then was Amabel full of sorrow at so grievous a sight; and she ran to draw out the arrows and bind up the wounds, which were many. But, 'Alas!' cried the youth, 'do not that! I would rather lose my life than be healed of one of these wounds. But of your gentleness and

pity, take up one of those fallen arrows and thrust it into me wherever you will, so will you make me glad!’

‘That,’ said Amabel, ‘I will not do; but if I may succour you, I will with all gladness.’

‘Nay,’ answered the youth, ‘you can do nothing for me, since you will not do what I ask. But your cruelty I will remember always; for now the pain of that arrow which you will not thrust into me is greater than the pain of all the rest that I bear already!’

So they took leave of him and went on their way. And said Amoris: ‘That is a good lover after a very foolish sort. God mend him of his folly!’

Soon they came upon another youth that sat by a small stream, and stooped over and looked at his face in the water as it ran by. And his face was fair, but hungry and wan for lack of food or sleep. Amoris spoke to him and said:

‘Fair sir, what fish are you after in these waters? Meseems that while you wait for your fish you are starving.’

‘Sir,’ answered the youth, ‘speak not to me! I am happy enough with what I see: if I waited to eat or drink, I should lose that fair image which I so dote over. Even now I trouble it with too much talking.’

Then said Amoris: ‘Poor fool, if we leave him thus he will die! I will devise a remedy for him.’

So he went on higher, till he came to a bend

in the stream where the banks were narrow and steep. Then he took moss, and earth, and stones, and made a dam over the stream and cut off its water, so that below it presently ran dry. After a while Amoris went back to see how the youth fared; and there he lay dead, with his face in the mud of the stream's bed where it had run dry and stolen from him the image upon which he so doted. 'Poor fool!' said Amoris; 'mud was in thy brain, and to mud thou art come at last!'

So fared they on, and came in a while to a place where many rabbits had made their burrows. And there in the midst upon the ground lay a man's head, with a shorn crown and face turned skyward.

'Surely,' said Amoris, when he beheld that, 'some foul deed has been done here!' And he came in all haste and pity toward where the man's head was lying.

But thereat the head began on a sudden to cry out most lamentably and to complain, and to speak thus: 'I pray you, if either of you be what may be called a fair maid, or well-favoured, or indeed passable to look on, that you come not this way at all, lest my eyes light on you! For it is pity if I look on a fair woman!'

Hearing the head so speak, Amoris cried: 'How now, old coney! art thou alive?'

'I am as much alive as thou art!' answered the head from the ground.

'Then,' said Amoris, 'whereas the body belonging to thee found hiding?'

The man answered: 'My body is safe within this hole, where no harm can come to it; but for my life's sake—since how else could I breathe?—I have to leave my head in danger. It is for that that I am afraid.'

'What is thy fear?' said Amoris.

'Alas!' said the man, 'I have made a great enemy of Love; and since he hath sworn to trap me, thus only can I keep free of him!'

Quoth Amoris, full of scorn: 'Poor worm, dost thou call thyself free now?'

'Yea, I am free in my body, and quit of him altogether!' answered the other. 'Tis only my head that endures peril; for, if a fair maid were to come this way and I lose custody of the eyes, then were I fallen head foremost into the trap Love hath prepared for me; yet, even then, she cannot have my body except I will.'

Then Amoris laughed aloud, and cried: 'Why, thou poor fool, thou hast begun all thy pains at the wrong end, and made safe where was no danger! For in thy head alone lies all the danger and the disease of love. How canst thou love except by the eyes, and by the ears, and by the exchange that lips make in words and kisses? Come then, and uproot thy body from this bed of earth, and bury thy head only, and thou shalt achieve peace!' So saying, he caught the fellow by the head, and thereafter by the shoulders, and so by main force drew him up from the rabbit-hole wherein he had planted himself. 'Now,' quoth he, 'thy need is only, when thou

seest a fair maid at hand, to thrust thy head into yonder hole again, and thou shalt be safe from her wiles: for from such attitude I think no maiden will wish to win thee! Only be swift now, and bury thy head, for I have a most fair maid here at hand, whom it were peril for thee thee to look on!’

So, at the word, like a rabbit fleeing from a weasel, the man ran his head into the hole and there held it.

Then Amoris took up his staff and with all his might began drubbing on the poor fool’s back, and crying: ‘Now, indeed, thou art fallen into Love’s trap; and all these kisses he sends thee to heal thee of thy lunacy. Hereafter rise up, and be a man!’

So with that he let him be, and could hear the fellow’s voice within the burrow roaring aloud for pity. ‘Oh Father Love!’ he cried, ‘kiss me no more! but bring any maid thou wilt, of whatever favour, and I will look on her and be thankful!’

‘Lo,’ said Amoris, ‘here is a mandrake that cries even before it is uprooted! What will it do after? God save any maid from mating with such an one!’

And therewith they left him.

Now they sing.

IN the wood where Love holds rule,
 Amoris hath met a fool,
 One that in a rabbit's hole
 Goes to burrow like a mole.
 'Fool, what now?' 'Fair Sir,' says he,
 'Here I keep my body free,
 Safe in holy custody,
 Where love cannot get at me!'
 Amoris, as quick as thought,
 Takes and turns the mind distraught;
 Where his feet had dug a bed,
 There will have him thrust his head;
 Where a fool when taught grows wise
 There in haste his staff he plies.
 'Ah, poor fool!' quoth Amoris,
 'Love hath trapped thee fast, I wis!
 Jackass, dost thou fear a kiss?
 Take this, and this!'

Now they say and narrate and the tale is told.



AFTER that they went on and passed other strange sights, seeing the many things that may happen to the victims of love if their love take the way of folly. So came they at last to a green meadow: and therein sat Father Love, a fair youth, with his wings folded and his bow lying at rest beside his quiver; and in his hand was a shepherd's crook made of green willow with the leaves fresh on it. And all round him were his flocks—a gay company—fair youths and maidens, old men and gray, and those that were in their prime; women of all ages also; no sort was missing there; and so many were they all, the eye could not count them.

And when Amabel and Amoris drew nigh, then came Father Love and kissed them both, and made them sit down among that fellowship. Then said Father Love to Amoris:

‘Thou hast danced enough. Knowest thou who brought thee here?’

‘I know not,’ said Amoris, ‘except it be Amabel, my dear delight; with her only have I come.’

‘Do you not remember,’ said Love, ‘the beggar on two wooden legs who sat in the church porch?’

‘I remember him,’ said Amoris.

‘Certes,’ said Love, ‘it seems that thou rememberest him very ill, and knowest but little what he did to thee! But he is a changeable fellow, and differently he looks to different men and on different days. Hadst thou but looked over thy shoulder when thou wast at thy dipping, then wouldst thou have seen him shepherding thee, and his crutch had been like this crook of green willow.’

Then said Amoris: ‘If that be so, Father Love, bid me dance to thee, and to all this fellowship; and I will do my best!’

‘Nay,’ said Love; ‘but thou shalt come and dance before the lady Alis only; and thou, Amabel, sweet friend of him, shalt come too!’

And Amoris looked at Alis and laughed, for she was so fair it was a pleasure to see. She had grey eyes, and her lips were like a young rose; and her hair was long and full of ripples as a brook over a bed of pebbles; and her face was like a peach fresh picked.

Then said Love to Amoris: ‘What see you here?’ And Amoris answered: ‘I see a fair maid that it were good for any man but me to wed; that is all.’

Then said Love, ‘Could you tell this face from Amabel’s?’

‘Certes!’ said Amoris. ‘Saving that they are both fair, I see no likeness in them at all.’

‘That is well,’ said the other, ‘for thou seest with the true eyes of love. Yet know this, that

no other man in all the world, save only yon merry rogue whom Lady Alis has chosen, could tell them apart. Therefore goes Amabel to the Count's castle to be the lady Alis, till you shall choose to come for her. And the lady Alis goes, if she will, to be a goat-girl, till this minstrel have a song fit to be sung at her bridal. Now shall the minstrel play to us, and Amoris dance; and Alis and Amabel kiss, since they are now friends and sisters.'

Now they sing.

IF for lovers' tales ye were,
 Now is ended all your care.
 Amoris goes forth to win
 Amabel of noble kin;
 Alis in the wild-wood stays;
 With the minstrel ends her days.
 Father Love hath brought to book
 All things by his shepherd's crook;
 Light his yoke of willow green,
 In his pastures peace is seen,
 In his brooks are hearts refreshed,
 In his woods bright birds are meshed,
 In his fields glad herds are flocked,
 At his laughter fools stand mocked;
 In his keeping holds he well
 Amoris and Amabel,
 Who, from the beginning friends,
 Now are brought to lovers' ends,

Whence the tale may backward run:
Lovers' ends mean life begun.
So for all that this tale tells
Let your ears be honey-cells.
But go hence, you loveless crew!
What with Love have ye to do?
 Till his arrow runs you through,
 I'll know not you!





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